

Perspectives

VOL. 18, NO. 3 FALL 2007

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NEWSLETTER of the PRICHARD COMMITTEE for ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

Coalition Seeks to Point More Toward College

'KentuckyCAN' Will Promote Education Beyond High School

The Prichard Committee and Kentucky's Council for Postsecondary Education recently launched a new effort to get more students, parents, and adults focused on earning a college degree.

The new Kentucky College Access Network, created in August, will work to coordinate existing efforts to promote postsecondary education and seek new ways to promote college-going. The groups will use a \$500,000 grant from the Indianapolis-based Lumina Foundation to build the KentuckyCAN program.

Joe McCormick, the executive director of KentuckyCAN, said the first step has involved taking stock of programs already pointing teens and adults toward college. KentuckyCAN will



Students at Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green work with a professor in a business course. (WKU Photo)

work to build a stronger coalition among those groups and at the same time look for gaps in current efforts. "We hope to discover new ways

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— Joe McCormick,
executive director, KentuckyCAN

Find out more about
KentuckyCAN
by calling the Prichard
Committee at (800) 928-2111.
On the Internet, visit
GoHigherKY.org

Members of the groups involved in the Kentucky College Access Network celebrated its launch with a group photo at the Council on Postsecondary Education offices in Frankfort in August.



KentuckyCAN

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to encourage kids in Kentucky to go on to college," said McCormick, the retired director of the Kentucky Higher Education Assistance Authority, a student loan group.

"More people need to pursue education beyond high school," McCormick said. "We don't have a real good track record in this state for that."

In 1997, Kentucky's postsecondary education reform program set goals for making college or university degrees a more common target. The state's goal for the number of citizens with bachelor's degrees is 791,000 by 2020. In 2000, Kentucky's total was 402,000, far below the national average.

Robert F. Sexton, the Prichard Committee's executive director, said the new initiative is an important step in getting more people on track to college. "Some level of postsecondary education is essential to participating successfully in today's economy," Sexton said. "There needs to be a more powerful, common message that explains why this is so important to parents and young people."

The new network will work with a group of programs aimed at getting students' and families' attention turned to college and making postsecondary education an affordable option. Existing programs already working on widening the group of people attending the state's colleges include:

- GEAR UP Kentucky, a program targeting low-income students in 27 counties starting in middle school;

- Federal TRIO programs encompassing six outreach and support programs that target low-income, first-generation college students and students with disabilities;

- About two dozen local P-16 councils, made up of leaders of elementary and secondary systems and postsecondary institutions, working to move more students from the elementary and secondary education system into college-level settings and remove barriers between the two systems.

McCormick said the state's challenge — getting more people focused on college — also creates a large pool of people young and old who can be motivated by KentuckyCAN's efforts. He said that recent reports showed that of every 100 Kentucky ninth graders, 65 graduate from high school, 39 enter college and only 15 earn a college degree. Those statistics show the size of the audience that could benefit from the new network's efforts.

"We've got to be more active in mentoring kids and sharing the benefits of a college education, but part of the challenge for us is cultural," McCormick said. "A large number of people in this state think college is not necessary, so we have to be strategic in thinking about how you alter that mindset."

BUILDING WIDER SUPPORT

McCormick said he hopes the new network can succeed in encouraging the state to get more active in promoting higher education. "We need to get policymakers in Frankfort to really see college access as a priority," he said.

The network will use the GoHigherKY.org Web site developed during McCormick's tenure at KHEAA to provide information about college admissions and costs, helping families and youth see a bridge between high school and postsecondary programs. Students can create accounts that help them see what kinds of classes and grades will prepare them for college and apply to colleges online. In addition to KHEAA, the site is also supported by CPE, the state education department and the state association of independent colleges and universities.

Sexton said the college-access program is connected to the Prichard Committee's efforts to boost achievement in high schools, making high school courses more challenging and a better transition to college-level work.

At the CPE, officials said KentuckyCAN is a necessary step in meeting the enrollment and degree targets that would move the state significantly higher in national rankings of educational attainment.

"We're delighted to work with the Prichard Committee," CPE President Tom Layzell said at the August kick-off. "Our partnership is a great opportunity to engage business and industry, civic and youth groups, educators, policymakers and citizens in creating a college-going culture in local communities throughout Kentucky."